

NEWS RELEASE

Alabama Department of Public Safety

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Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee Join in ‘Take Back Our Highways’ *Tri-state Traffic Safety Initiative Targets Thanksgiving Holiday*

MONTGOMERY — Alabama Gov. Bob Riley joined the Alabama Department of Public Safety, Mississippi Highway Patrol, Tennessee Highway Patrol and sheriff and police departments throughout Alabama in announcing Thursday an intensive joint initiative to reduce traffic fatalities and increase safety during the upcoming Thanksgiving holidays.

The program, “Take Back Our Highways,” will place all available law enforcement officers from participating agencies on patrol duty Nov. 19-25 in an intensive highway safety effort throughout the tri-state area, said Col. J. Christopher Murphy, director of the Alabama Department of Public Safety.

Joining Riley and Murphy to announce the initiative were Col. Michael Berthay, director of the Mississippi Highway Patrol, and Col. Mike Walker, director of the Tennessee Highway Patrol. Murphy, Berthay and Walker also scheduled news conferences in Nashville and Jackson, Miss., to announce the safety program.

“Our efforts in Alabama are working to save lives. Our emphasis on safety has helped reduce traffic deaths and injuries on rural Alabama roads to their lowest levels in four years,” said Riley. “Now, we are pleased to be joined by our neighbors, Mississippi and Tennessee, in making all our highways safer this Thanksgiving season,” the governor said.

Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour said, “Many Mississippians travel to be with family and friends during the Thanksgiving holiday. Our officers will have a strong presence during the entire week to ensure that trip is a safe one.”

“The goal of this effort is saving lives,” said Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen. “The safety of Tennesseans and those who travel through our state is paramount, and I urge all those traveling during the Thanksgiving holiday period to obey the laws designed to keep them safe.”

The Alabama Department of Public Safety first introduced “Take Back Our Highways” in August to save lives and increase public awareness about safety, said Murphy.

The program placed every available state trooper in uniform and on patrol Aug. 13-17, including the addition of approximately 200 troopers normally assigned to duties other than patrol. During that week, rural traffic deaths in Alabama were cut 69 percent compared with the same period in 2006.

Rural traffic deaths in Alabama have continued to decline, with 73 fewer fatalities recorded as of Nov. 6, compared with 2006.

Murphy said the results of “Take Back Our Highways” prompted plans to schedule a second interval during the peak Thanksgiving travel period involving fellow officers in Alabama and in Mississippi and Tennessee.

“In the tri-state area, we are committed to giving holiday travelers one more reason to be thankful: arriving safely,” said Murphy.

Throughout the Thanksgiving week, officers in all three states will target primary driving behaviors that cause crashes and contribute to more severe crashes, Murphy said. These include speeding, failure to yield the right of way, following too closely, driver inattention, and DUI.

Tennessee’s Walker and Mississippi’s Berthay both said the public can expect to see a marked increase in the number of law enforcement officers on the road and a marked increase in

for more information contact:

Public Information/Education • P.O. Box 1511 • Montgomery AL 36102-1511

(334) 242-4445 • <http://www.dps.state.al.us/>

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the number of citations issued. “The goal is saving lives,” said Walker, “and we believe the rigorous enforcement is worth the effort.”

Berthay noted the importance of interagency cooperation. “In our changing society, it has become clear that we must work together with our counterparts across state lines to make our roads and highways safer and ensure an enjoyable Thanksgiving holiday,” he said.

In Alabama, troopers, police officers and deputies will target crash-prone areas and implement line patrols, saturation patrols, driver license checkpoints, and LIDAR details, Murphy said. Approximately 200 additional troopers and officers from sheriff and police departments throughout the state will take part in the initiative.

Bobby Timmons, executive director of the Alabama Sheriffs Association, said, “Alabama’s sheriffs are in full support of taking back our highways to reduce traffic fatalities and remove drunken drivers from our roadways.”

Red Bay Police Chief Pat Creel, president of the Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police, said, “Supporting this initiative is certainly worthwhile since, statistically, it saves lives. Proactive enforcement of traffic laws is a time-tested and proven remedy used to reduce the number of traffic crashes and deaths caused by those crashes. Our department is on board.”

In Mississippi and Tennessee, officers will maintain an enhanced presence throughout the holiday week, looking for impaired and unlicensed drivers, speeding and seat belt and child restraint violations. All three states will work together in bordering counties to conduct driver license and sobriety checkpoints.

Officers encourage motorists to buckle up, obey the speed limit and all other traffic laws, and refrain from drinking and driving to help ensure their safety and that of others during the Thanksgiving holiday.

In 2006 in Alabama, during the 102-hour holiday period (6 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 22, through midnight Sunday, Nov. 26), 19 persons were killed in traffic crashes. Twelve of the fatalities were rural, and seven urban; at least three of the fatalities were alcohol-related, and eight of the occupants killed were not using seat belts.

In Mississippi, five persons died in traffic crashes during Thanksgiving in 2006. Only one of the five was wearing a seat belt, and two of the fatal crashes involved alcohol.

In Tennessee, 20 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes during the 2006 Thanksgiving holiday. Four of the fatalities died in alcohol-involved crashes, and 60 percent of the occupants killed were not using safety restraints.

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Contacts:
Governor’s Press Office
334-242-7150

Office of Public Affairs
Mississippi Department of Public Safety
601-987-1390

Public Information/Education
Alabama Department of Public Safety
334-242-4445

Office of Public Affairs
Tennessee Department of Safety
615-251-5131

for more information contact:

Public Information/Education • P.O. Box 1511 • Montgomery AL 36102-1511

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